

HB 314: Expand Montana Schools of Promise

Sponsored by Rep. Carolyn Pease-Lopez

The OPI requests \$1.3M for the 2017 biennium to provide intensive supports to school districts that have the lowest rates of student achievement across the state. This proposal builds on the successes and lessons learned from OPI's work with four school systems over the past five years through the Montana Schools of Promise initiative. These are schools that face significant challenges related to poverty, trauma and rurality. The OPI proposes to work with an additional four school districts to augment their school improvement efforts with additional staff supports – a school board coach, a mental health wraparound facilitator, and a graduation coach.



What is the Montana Schools of Promise initiative?

Montana Schools of Promise is a priority initiative of State Superintendent Denise Juneau to dramatically improve learning outcomes at our state's most struggling schools, all of which are located on Indian Reservations. The initiative received a significant boost in 2010 through an \$11.6M federally-funded School Improvement Grant (SIG), and for the past four years the OPI has worked in partnership with five schools on three reservations: Lame Deer High School (Northern Cheyenne), Frazer High School (Fort Peck), Plenty Coups High School, Pryor K-6 and Pryor 7-8 (Crow). With a recent appropriation of \$1.2M in federal SIG funds, the OPI began a partnership with Hays-Lodge Pole High School (Fort Belknap) in 2014.

The OPI placed five staff members in each community to focus on each group of stakeholders necessary for success in a school turnaround effort: Transformational Leader (school leadership), Instructional Leader (teacher effectiveness), School Board Coach (trustee leadership and engagement), Community Liaison (engagement of students, families, and tribes), and a Mental Health Wraparound Facilitator (mental health and well-being of students).

The Results:

Student achievement and community engagement increased in every school. The most successful elements of the effort included: increased school board efficacy, improved leadership, establishment of strong school teams, improved instruction and assessment (particularly in English and math programs and interventions, industrial arts programs, and physical education), better data collection and monitoring, more stable and engaging school climates, and strong student voice and empowerment. Community attendance at school events has increased 100% in two of the communities. Pryor had a 100% graduation rate in 2014, and the Frazer school board was recently recognized by the Montana School Boards Association with a 'Golden Gavel' award.

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Proposing a State Investment in Schools of Promise

The OPI proposes to work with four new school districts to enhance their current school improvement efforts with: a school board coach, a mental health wraparound facilitator, and a graduation coach. These three positions in each district will help to stabilize the administrative infrastructure through work with the board of trustees and superintendent (school board coach); provide direct student mental health well-being services to foster strengths and resiliency in children with complex needs (wraparound facilitator); and engage students in their academic goals (graduation coach). Support and coordination of local efforts will be provided by 2.5 new FTE at the Office of Public Instruction: OPI Montana Schools of Promise program coordinator (1.0 FTE); school board coach coordinator (.50 FTE), and wraparound program coordinator (1.0 FTE).

School Board Coach: Stabilize the Administrative Infrastructure

A school board coach works with a local Board of Trustees to build the capacity of school board members and the administration to develop, update, and implement school policies that focus on student achievement, continuous improvement, and collaboration. The coach does this through extensive training and hands-on support, including board agenda development, support of fiscal and infrastructure development, and clarification of administrative rule. Board coaches provide accurate and legal information to boards so that they can make educationally sound decisions for their district.

Graduation Coach: Engage Students in their Academic Goals

The Schools of Promise Graduation Coach provides a critical link between struggling students and supportive services. The Graduation Coach works with students to complete homework assignments, come to school, and stay on track to graduate. The Graduation Coach helps to develop interventions, coordinate services and supports with school counselors and administration, and serves as a mentor for struggling students. The role of a Graduation Coach is based on a strategy that OPI has employed over the past four years of Schools of Promise to connect struggling students to a caring, consistent mentor.

Mental Health “wraparound” services: Provide Students with Direct Mental Health Services

“Wraparound” is a process used by communities to support students with complex needs and their families through individualized plans of care. The key characteristics of a plan of care include: developed by a family-centered team, individualized based on the strengths and culture of the youth and their family, and needs-driven rather than services-driven. Youth are able to stay in their community and develop lifelong skills to cope with stress and disruption in their lives. Our wraparound facilitators are trained to engage individual youth and their families (team members) to empower them through developing their strengths while identifying their needs. Needs vary from homeless students, to those with attendance problems, to those with unmet mental and emotional needs. Facilitators connect students to resources, professional and cultural, as well as day-to-day living resources (clothing, shoes, food, transportation, etc.) and adult mentors. Professional services include mental health supports through IHS, the county or other public agencies. The facilitators also connect them to tribal or county legal authorities in some emergency instances. Also, if they choose, the facilitators can connect them to tribal elders and other traditional culture bearers.